

TRUE STATE OF THE QUESTION,

ADDRESSED TO THE

PETITIONERS

FOR THE

ABOLITION

OF THE

SLAVE TRADE.

BY A PLAIN MAN,

WHO SIGNED THE PETITION AT DERBY.

LONDON.

PRINTED FOR J. BELL, BRITISH LIBRARY, STRAND.

MDCCXCII.

[*Price Sixpence.*]

THE

TRUE STATE OF THE QUESTION.

Friends, and Fellow Countrymen,

WHEN an honest man has been led into error, it is his duty not only to recant himself, but being fairly convinced, to warn others in the same situation, and save them as much as possible from fruitless repentance and regret.

I am a plain well-meaning man, who thought I was doing my duty to my God and my Country, in signing the Petition from this Town. The Squire is a rich man, and they say printed a Book of Verses some years ago, so I thought he must be a wise man; moreover, he is my Landlord, and he said, "*Thomas*, it is your duty to sign against this unchristian wickedness;" and so I signed. Many thousands set their names to these Petitions in the same manner, for we in the country know nothing of what is doing in India, and Africa, and those parts, but what we are told; the more infamous

those who deceive us with falsehoods, and get us to sign Petitions, which if Parliament attends to, I now plainly see, must reduce thousands of families to beggary, put the Blacks in a much worse state than they are, and end in Old England paying about two millions of additional Taxes, a sum now paid by the Planters on goods imported from the West Indies, which it is impossible to produce without the labour of the Blacks.

This information I owe to a Parson who was on a visit at Nottingham, and who had been Chaplain to a Regiment in Jamaica. He said he wished our labouring poor were half as well off as the Negroes: they have each a little snug house and garden, and plenty of pigs and poultry: that exclusive of every Sunday, and half every Saturday, their Masters allow them one day in fourteen for themselves. Those who are industrious are much at their ease; and the Parson says it is a common thing to see at their feasts, fine fowls, very good beef, English bottled porter, and wine. Who has ever seen such fare in a Labourer's house in England? Who can expect to see it even in a Farmer's, when we shall have those taxes laid upon us, now paid by the West Indians, which must be the case if our Petitions succeed. Were a poor man here to give one such dinner as the Negroes, the savings of his whole life would not suffice; for small indeed will be the savings of a Labourer, who must clothe his wife, clothe his children, nourish his family, pay the doctor when they are sick, pay his rent, and purchase even the tools with which he earns his scanty and precarious subsistence. He is the slave of the most inexorable master—Necessity—and even the Game that ravages the little corn, or small garden, he possibly may have, and which might occasionally procure him a wholesome hearty meal, he dares not touch. As the Parson properly observed, we should in the first instance restore freedom to, and
relieve

relieve the wants of our own poor.—Remove the beam from our own eye, before we meddle with the mote in our brother's.

He proceeded to give me an account of the Negroes on the Plantations where he had been.

They have a house and garden for nothing, clothes found them, food found them, both good and sufficient, the best doctors in the Country to attend them when sick, their wives and children provided for, and all without any expence. The Parson, who lived there three years, says this is the general state of the Negroes on all the Plantations he saw; and that in a great many parts they catch, by the means of springes or snares, abundance of wild pidgeons and Guinea-hens.

He acknowledges some of them are at times whipped; but generally for crimes for which in England they would be hanged, or (in our great mercy) sent to starve to death in Botany Bay. He concluded by saying, that in Africa they are in a wretched situation, and in a much more abject state of slavery than in our Islands; that we had mistaken the matter grossly; that to abolish the Trade, would not be to make the Blacks free, but to leave them a prey to every misery that savage Tyranny can inflict. To prove this, he sent me next day the following paper, which I recommend to your serious perusal: it clearly shews, that the Africans are brought from the most barbarous state, where no comfort or enjoyment is known, to one of great comparative happiness, and not subject to so much labour as any working man in England.

The above I have written from a thorough conviction of my error, and I am really sincerely sorry, that my name appeared

to

to any Petition against a Trade, productive of such partial evil and general advantage.

I am, Friends and Fellow Petitioners,

Your Well-wisher,

A CONVERT to the TRUTH.

A TRUE and ACCURATE ACCOUNT of the Condition of the NEGROES in their own Country ; taken from the EVIDENCE given before the LORDS of the COMMITTEE of the COUNCIL, appointed for the Consideration of all Matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations.

SIR GEORGE YONGE,

Was four times on the Coast, which is chiefly divided into petty States ; the Sovereigns have power of life and death, regard their subjects as slaves, and treat them accordingly.

Mr. ALEXANDER FALCONBRIDGE, Surgeon,

Who had made five voyages, “ spoke of the Fantyn Nation “ as more civilized than most others, but even there the confidential Servant, male and female, of every person of distinction, are actually put to death, and interred with them ; “ and that tradition says, formerly a much more considerable number were put to death with their Lords.”

It

It is a fair inference, that the opportunities they now have of selling their Slaves to Europeans, has so much diminished this barbarous practice.

RICHARD MILES, Esq.

LATE GOVERNOR OF CAPE COAST CASTLE,

Resided on the Coast of Africa eighteen years, and asserts,
 “ that he had ocular demonstration of human sacrifices still
 “ being made to their idols, which are Reptiles, Rivers,
 “ Rocks, and other material objects !”

JEROME BERNARD WEAVES, Esq.

GOVERNOR OF ANNAMABOE,

Resided in Africa fourteen years. He has seen the human victims parading about, and dressed out, who were to be sacrificed at the death of persons of distinction. This horrid custom Europeans have endeavoured to prevent, but without effect.

ARCHIBALD DALZELL, Esq.

FOUR YEARS GOVERNOR OF WHYDAH,

Speaking of the Kingdom of Dahomy, which is the largest bordering on the Gold Coast, declares, that in the whole
 Kingdom

Kingdom there is no individual Freeman, except the King, who is absolutely master of the lives and properties of his Subjects, and he sports with their lives in the most wanton and cruel manner.

ROBERT NORRIS, Esq.

A CAROLINA MERCHANT,

Has seen, at the Gates of the King's Palace, two piles of human heads, like shot in an Arsenal. When an audience is given, the heads of persons newly put to death are strewed in the passage that leads to the Royal Apartment, in order to inspire the person to be admitted with awe. The roof of the Palace is decorated with human heads. Parents have no sort of property in their children; they all belong to the King, and are taken by his order from their Mother at an early age, and distributed in Villages remote from the place of their nativity, where there is little chance of their being ever recognized by their Parents. When the King waters the graves of his Ancestors, (a phrase for deluging them with human blood) which is an annual custom, very many are put to death, particularly such as Europeans may have refused to purchase.

Another proof, that the Slave Trade tends to preserve the lives of the Blacks.

Mr. NORRIS adds, "that if the King is in want of European Goods, a small number of Slaves are executed; but the number increases as his wants are fewer."

Suppress the Slave Trade, and it is evident human sacrifices would be endless.

Mr.

Mr. NORRIS, not willing such horrid, and to English ears, incredible instances of cruelty should rest on his simple assertion, called on

WILLIAM DEVAYNES, Esq.

Who was Governor in Africa twelve years, to corroborate his evidence.—Mr. DEVAYNES confirms Mr. NORRIS's accounts of the annual sacrifice of about sixty men and women to the manes of the King's Ancestors; and adds, that if a man falls down in the space before the King's Palace, which is of four or five hundred yards, he is immediately put to death, it being presumed he had some disloyal thoughts in his head to make him fall on level ground.—When the Queen's Mother died, he was present at one of the Chief Officers' being taken to be put to death, merely as a mark of respect. While he was there, he does not recollect one of the King's Officers dying a natural death.

GOVERNOR DALZELL

Declares, that in Whydah, on the death of a Man, his Wife and Property all go to the King, but he *sometimes* restores it to those families whom he finds meritorious.

Mr. DALZELL, at an Annual Feast where the King regales the people, saw a Man tied, an Alligator tied, a pair of Pidgeons also tied, flung from a stage, *all* of which, as he was informed, were put to death by the people below.

During this Feast, which continues some days, Mr. DAL-

ZELL always found, upon going to the King's house, heads that appeared to have been newly cut off; and he has seen about twenty of those victims at a time. Previous to their execution, they were tied to stakes, and exhibited for a day or two before their execution, which he presumes was done in the night; he has been desired to go and see it, but never would.

These victims, he understood, were sent to attend the King's Ancestors in the other world.

Mr. PENNY,

Saw human sacrifices made to the manes of a deceased King of Bonny. This Country, Mr. PENNY declares to be like the rest; the lives and properties of the People being at the disposal of the Prince.

Now follows the Evidence of Mr. FULLER, Mr. LONG, and other Gentlemen, respecting the state of the Negroes in the West Indies, given before the Lords of the Committee.

Their State in the Islands.

A Slave cannot lose his life, nor be imprisoned for life, but on being found guilty of certain crimes, by Nine Freeholders, no ways interested in the case, before Three Justices of the Peace, all sworn to do justice.

The life of a Slave is held as sacred as that of a white person,

son, and any Master occasioning the death of a Slave, is guilty of Felony, without Benefit of Clergy.

Such is the commerce that the industrious Slaves carry on in pork and poultry, and corn and vegetables, that they are in actual possession of nine-tenths of the smaller silver currency of the Island ; nor has any example been found in the memory of man, that the Owners of such Negroes have deprived them of any part of their acquisitions, which by long practice and usage, are universally considered as their own property ; which they may keep, dispose of, or devise at their own pleasure ; and many could purchase their Freedom, were they of opinion it would render their condition more comfortable and happy than it is at present.

The Law obliges Planters to furnish sufficient clothing to the Negroes, and they are generally well clothed ; besides, there are few Sugar Estates where the Negroes do not from their own private earnings provide themselves with extra clothes for Sundays and Holidays.

The established Negroes live in houses perfectly convenient to themselves, and adapted to the climate ; when they want repairing, time, materials, and assistance are allowed them for those purposes. Upon the whole, we believe them to be far better clothed, lodged and fed in Jamaica, than the Peasantry of Europe in general.

The Negroes have on an average ~~seven~~ ^{seven} hours in every twenty-four, for the purposes of repose and refreshment.

EXTRACTS from the LAWS in force in JAMAICA.

When punished for crimes by whipping, the Laws allow at most thirty-nine lashes for the same offence.

Are the Armies in Europe under such restrictions ?

It is now enacted by a positive Law, which before was only custom, that the Negroes have one day; exclusive of Sundays, in every fourteen, over and above the usual holidays, for the cultivation of their own grounds and gardens.

LORD RODNEY, SIR PETER PARKER, Admiral BARRINGTON, SIR JOSHUA ROWLEY, Admiral HOTHAM, and others,

All declared before the Committee, that during their residence in the West Indies, they observed the Slaves were treated with great humanity; that they were satisfied with their condition; that they were not over-worked; that they were well clothed, well lodged, well fed; in a word, they generally declared, they thought them better off than the labouring Poor in this Country.

I suppose, now, my good Friend, you have read the accounts drawn from Evidence given before the Lords of the Committee, you will there perceive, without any comment of mine, what was the situation of the Black in Africa, and what it actually is in our Islands; you will see, that he is brought from a Country where Laws are yet unknown; where he has no property even in his life; where all that man holds dear is at the disposal of a Despot, at whose nod Children are torn from the breast of the Mother; where the Parents are offered in sacrifice to the vanity of the Tyrant; where

where the miserable Slave creeps to his pallet, surrounded but by horrors, and awakes only to new scenes of bloodshed and of oppression ; where murder is magnificence, and acts of cruelty alone proclaim the Power of the Prince. From this abject, this disgraceful condition, which makes the mind thrill with horror to contemplate, and the hand tremble in the description, he is brought to us in a state of Slavery it is true ; but how mitigated, how different from the tyranny and scenes of carnage he has left ! With us his life is inviolate, his property is protected, and by a late Act, the slightest punishment cannot be inflicted, but as regulated by Law ; he lives amongst his children, who share his labour in the vigour of his life, and are his comfort and solace in his age ; he dies surrounded by his friends and relatives, to whom he bequeaths in confidence and security the earnings of an industrious life. And shall we close the asylum to him for ever ? The interests of humanity more even than the interests of the State, forbids it.

If we are to solicit the interference of Parliament, let it be to enforce the regulations already made for his instruction in our Holy Religion, so that the finishing feature may be put to this faithful picture of his condition ; so that this Trade, which interest has belied, ignorance reprobated, and credulity endeavoured to destroy, shall not only be the means of rescuing thousands of our fellow-creatures from tyranny and death, but bring them from the grossest idolatry to a knowledge of of the True God, make their lives comfortable here, and insure their everlasting happiness.

I am, my dear Friend,

Your Well-wisher,

Late a CHAPLAIN in the ARMY.

P. S.

P. 5. In one or two places in the Evidence respecting the state of the Blacks in Africa, you will see a line or two *scored under* ; those lines are my Observations, and not part of the Evidence.—In speaking of the state of the Blacks in our Islands, I have confined myself chiefly to the Evidence respecting Jamaica, being the Island I am best acquainted with, and the condition of the Negroes being much the same in all the Island.